

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

22 June 1979

National Intelligence Officers

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, National Foreign  
Assessment Center

VIA: Director of Political Analysis

FROM: John H. Holdridge  
National Intelligence Officer for China

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National Intelligence Officer for USSR-EE

SUBJECT: OPA Paper on Indochina and the Sino-  
Soviet Rivalry

REFERENCE:

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1. We agree with the major conclusion of this paper--that the Vietnamese are stubborn and perservering and are in a position of considerable strength--but we don't think this exhausts the points that a balanced paper might make. As it now stands, the paper is written from a narrowly conceived Vietnamese perspective. The complexities of Chinese, Soviet and ASEAN calculations and concerns are all given relatively little attention. We made orally a series of specific suggestions when we first had a chance to examine the paper. At this stage we merely reiterate the broader issues which concern us.

2. Although presented from a Vietnamese point of view, the paper develops Hanoi's position in what seems to us to be an excessively narrow framework. There is little discussion

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of economic factors; if OPA/EA believes that constraints in this area are of relatively little importance we believe it should argue the case more fully. In general we think that Vietnamese motives and calculations should be looked at in a broader context and in greater detail.

3. Problems of this order are compounded when parties other than Vietnam are considered. The paper, for example, is badly in need of a discussion of Soviet views on such subjects as the acceptable level of risk to run for Vietnam in the event of another Chinese attack, the acceptability of the economic burden involved in supporting Vietnam, the relative weight of the Soviet gains registered in Vietnam in comparison with whatever setbacks may have been suffered in dealings with ASEAN, the value to the USSR of the specific military benefits thus far achieved in Vietnam, and how badly the USSR needs to have these benefits and facilities transformed into permanent bases. These are all matters [redacted]

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but are hardly treated in the paper.

4. Much the same can be said for the China aspect of the paper. More needs to be said about current Chinese strategy--what it is, how viable it is, how long it can be sustained. We would hope also for a sustained discussion of whether and under what circumstances the Chinese might attack again. Have Chinese attitudes evolved in the past year? What factors could cause them to change in the future? These are questions that are widely canvassed in the community--and have been since the war ended. They [redacted]

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[redacted] receive little treatment in the paper. Moreover, Chinese motives in general are, we believe, given too little attention in the paper. It ascribes to Beijing a simple-minded anti-Sovietism and little more. We believe that other, alternative or complicating factors should be considered. Does China have an interest regarding Vietnam other than Hanoi's Soviet connection? Did questions of Chinese credibility enter the picture?

5. We continue also to think that further discussion of the ASEAN perspective is desirable. Are ASEAN attitudes immutable over time? Is the only variable a Vietnam victory in Kampuchea? How does the refugee problem fit in--does it harm Vietnamese or Chinese long-term interests most? What factors would change the attitudes of individual countries? Here again a wider perspective and more subtle argumentation would, we think, improve the paper.

6. Some sections of the paper cause us particular trouble.

a. The Vietnamese and Chinese invasions. As it now stands, this section bears little relevance to the rest of the paper. The Vietnamese discussion merely rehashes the subject of Hanoi's timing and does not address the question of why Vietnam attempted to overrun all of Kampuchea in any terms but tactical military considerations. We think also that several arguments raised in this discussion can be questioned. Moreover, although there is strong, voluminous evidence that the Chinese decision to attack was taken very late in the day, such evidence is not even mentioned. Apart from evidence, there are logical problems with the argument. If a Chinese attack were a foregone conclusion, as the paper tactfully argues, did the Vietnamese think this the case? Why did they not have more forces opposite the Chinese border?


b. Future Alternatives. We think this section, which should be the heart of the paper, is its weakest part. The short and long-term alternatives are both projected along a single narrow track, and made dependent on a single variable (the course of the fighting in Kampuchea) in a fashion which does not address the many variables. There is no sustained discussion either of Vietnamese choices and actions or the reactions of others to a situation in which the Vietnamese do not gain their "victory" in Kampuchea in the short run. Moreover, building on what we would consider the less likely alternative, attainment of such a clear-cut victory, discussion of the short term prospects then posits a Vietnamese attempt to rope in Sihanouk--an interesting proposition, but not necessarily the only or most likely alternative. Nevertheless, the paper pursues this speculation at length, with little attention to other approaches. Discussion of the longer-term future is also unconvincing. We find the conjectures about future Soviet demands upon Vietnam and resulting quarrels

with Hanoi unpersuasive, not supported by argumentation, and not balanced by alternative hypotheses. We also find the discussion of China's role foreshortened. What would China consider a "genuine coalition government"? How much is half a loaf? Would Beijing contenance Vietnamese troops on Kampuchean soil? How would China wish to shape its relations with a chastened Vietnam? How much of a break with Moscow would be needed? How much would be in the cards in the eventuality suggested?

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7. In addition to the issues raised above, we differ with the authors on a few particular judgments. We question the assertion [ ] that "it is probable that neither side has raised the issue" of the degree of Soviet commitment to Hanoi's security. It appears to us difficult to believe that the question did not at least come up during the initial negotiation of article 6 of the new Soviet-Vietnamese treaty, since the primary purpose of the treaty from Hanoi's point of view was to imply the existence of some kind of commitment. It is also difficult to believe that the matter was not discussed in some form during the period of the Chinese incursion. This is not to suggest that the Soviets have not been evasive and have not preferred to leave the matter ambiguous. Surely, however, this has been an issue between the two sides.

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John H. Holdridge

  
for Arnold L. Horelick

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